

# A LETTER FROM DR. SEAN LUCAS

December 10, 2020

My dear Friends:

As I do each year, I wanted to share some of the best books that I read over the past year. Most of these were published this year and most are available (and were purchased!) at the IPC Bookstore. By God's grace, I was able to finish an unusually high number of books, but there were two books in particular that ministered to my soul in remarkable ways, so much so that I have given them away to others:

Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*. A former student of mine at Covenant Seminary, Dane relentlessly applies the Gospel to our weary souls. All too often, I struggle to believe this Gospel that is so good: that Jesus welcomes us as sinners. He doesn't demand that we clean ourselves up, he doesn't reject us after we've failed him the umpteenth time, he doesn't turn away from us. Rather, he pursues us over and over again. Dane reminded me through these words. I'd recommend reading the 23 chapters one-at-a-time to allow your soul to marinate in Jesus' grace for you.

M. Craig Barnes, *Diary of a Pastor's Soul: The Holy Moments in a Life of Ministry*. I tend to read these kinds of books by long-serving pastors in order to reflect on my own practice of ministry; this was one of the best I've ever read. President of Princeton Seminary, Barnes uses the fictional conceit of being a pastor in his last year of retirement and writing a weekly diary of what that year of ministry is like. In doing so, he gets closer to what I have known in my ministry over the past twenty years than anyone else I've read. There were times where I laughed out loud in recognition, there were other times I wept because *he got it right*—he understood me. If you want to understand pastors and ministry, this offers insight on nearly each page.

There was a third book in this "genre" that has stuck with me since I read it: J. Todd Billings, *The End of the Christian Life: How Embracing Our Mortality Frees Us to Truly Live*. A professor of Reformed theology at Western Theological Seminary in Michigan, Billings has been diagnosed with an inoperable and terminal form of cancer. As he reflects on his own approaching mortality, he engages the Bible and the Reformed tradition to help us in considering what life is really about and remembering our own coming deaths can actually help us live in the present. Lots of good insight and theological reflection here.

There were two Christian biography/history books that were simply outstanding—both well-written and insightful to our Reformed tradition. James Eglinton's biography of Herman Bavinck (*Bavinck: A Critical Biography*) is utterly brilliant. You may not know Bavinck: he was a Dutch theologian who was a colleague of Abraham Kuyper and taught at the Theological Seminary at Kampden and the Free University of Amsterdam. Over the past twenty years, as more of Bavinck's corpus has been translated into English, his influence and reputation have grown astronomically. Eglinton's achievement is to

CONTINUED

work all of the Dutch and English sources into a readable and insightful account of this significant theologian.

Charles Cotherman, *To Think Christianly: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement*. I read this book on vacation and so enjoyed it. Cotherman shows how L'Abri, Regent College, and Ligonier Ministries were all geared toward trying to educate laypeople, seeking to inculcate a Christian worldview broadly anchored in the Reformed tradition. These three ministries set the stage for the Christian Study Center movement, which prospered for a time in the 1970s, but would finally anchor in Charlottesville, Virginia, through the efforts of Trinity Presbyterian Church there and its leadership. A fast-paced and thought-provoking account.

There were two other biographies that I thoroughly enjoyed this year. During the shutdown in March and April, I went on a bit of a Churchill (and British and European history) run. Andrew Roberts' biography, *Churchill: Walking with Destiny*, was brilliant: highly readable, sympathetically-critical, engaging. It is the best one-volume biography of Churchill that I've read. I'm also a big Abraham Lincoln fan, having read many books about him. David Reynolds's biography, *Abe: Abraham Lincoln in his Times*, was something completely different. An effort at micro-history, Reynolds used Lincoln's life as a window on 19<sup>th</sup>-century America and showed that Lincoln's success was dependent on his ability to represent those times in his own person. Don't be scared by the length of the book—it is eminently readable and thoroughly enjoyable.

Hopefully, there might be one or two books on this list that interest you. Especially in this strange season in which we've found ourselves, I hope that you have found some good books to encourage your soul to run to Jesus, to feed your mind, and to pass the time. If you have a "best book of the year," I'd love to hear about it!

In the grip of God's grace,

